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THE BOMBER GIPSY

BY

A. P. HERBERT

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THE BOMBER GIPSY

AND OTHER POEMS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

HALF-HOURS AT HELLES

(Blackwell, Oxford)

THE BOMBER GIPSY

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

LIEUT. A. P. HERBERT
(LATE HAWKE BATT., ROYAL NAVAL DIVISION)

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

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First Published in 1918

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TWENTY-ONE of these pieces have already appeared in *Punch*, and I am indebted to the proprietors of that paper for their courtesy in permitting me to reprint them. "After the Battle" appeared in *The New Statesman*, and "The Atrocity" in *Queen Alexandra's Hospital Magazine*.

A. P. H.

February 1918

TO MY WIFE

AND TO ALL THE WIVES

WHO HAVE WAITED AND WONDERED

BUT ESPECIALLY

TO THE WIVES OF THE R.N.D.

You may not ride through magic regions
With fifty-score companions near,
Or know the hope that lives in legions,
The fellowship that laughs at fear,
Or songs at sunset in the lovely haven
When with great cheers the teeming ships set out—
Only the loneliness that makes men craven,
The silent furniture—the chill, dumb doubt.

But the swords flash, the cannon thunder
Full oft in your imaginings:
For you each night your man goes under,
And cursèd is the strife of Kings.
When lone winds wail, and cruel windows rattle,
And empty chairs sit mocking round the fire,
Too oft, I know, you sit and dream of battle,
Of blood and wounds and dead men on the wire.

And when far back in warm green levels
He lies with all the restful host,
With dance and jest and midnight revels,
And Home is but a tavern toast,
For you the wind still howls about the sashes,
For you the regiments are relieved in vain:
You see no singers in the ruthless ashes,
Only the wet, the weariness, the pain.

Yet may you in this jester's pages
Be sure the battle sometimes ends,
Nor only death the soldier's wages,
But there are farms and laughing friends,
And wine and wonders and delicious leisures,
And dreaming villages where children dwell—
And if, mayhap, you cannot catch the pleasures,
Believe, at least, it is not always Hell.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Bomber Gipsy	1
Ballade of Incipient Lunacy	4
The Rest-Rumour	7
A Lost Leader	10
The Incorrigibles	12
At the Dump	15
The Battle of Codson's Beard	18
After the Battle	21
Open Warfare	23
The Revelation	26
Beaucourt Revisited	29
The Runner	32
The Investiture	34
The Atrocity	37
The Ballad of Jones's Blighty	39
The Trench Code	41
The Coming of Peace	43

PAGE

THE HUMILIATION OF THE PALFREY . . . 46

"THE CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY" . . . 49

TO THE REGIMENT 51

ZERO 55

THE SWAN-SONG OF THE BAVARIANS . . . 58

THE MISCHIEF-MAKERS 62

THE ROMANCERS 65

"AT DAWN" 67

PATROLS 69

THE DESERTERS 73

FREE MEALS 76

THE VENGEANCE 78

THE WAR-DREAM 80

THE PASSING OF THE COD'S HEAD . . . 82

THE BOMBER GIPSY

AND OTHER POEMS

THE BOMBER GIPSY

Come, let me tell the oft-told tale again
 Of that strange Tyneside grenadier we had,
Whom none could quell or decently constrain,
 For he was turbulent and sometimes bad ;
Yet, stout of heart, he dearly loved to fight,
And spoke his fellows on a gusty night
In some high barn, where, huddled in the straw,
 They watched the cheap wicks gutter on the shelf,
How he was irked with discipline and law,
 And would fare forth to battle by himself,

This said, he left them and returned no more ;
 But whispers passed from Vimy to Verdun,
Where'er the fields ran thickliest with gore,
 Of some stray bomber that belonged to none,
But none more fierce or flung a fairer bomb,
Who ran unscathed the gamut of the Somme

And followed Freyberg up the Beaucourt mile,
With uncouth cries and streaming muddy hair;
But after, when they sought his name and style
And would have honoured him—he was not there.

For most he loved to lie upon Lorette
And, couched on cornflowers, gaze across the lines
At Vimy's heights—we had not Vimy yet—
Pale Souchez's bones and Lens among the mines,
The tall pit-towers and dusky heaps of slag,
Until, like eagles on the mountain-crag
By strangers stirred, with hoarse indignant shrieks
Gunners emerged from some deep-delvêd lair
To chase the intruder from their sacred peaks
And cast him down to Ablain St. Nazaire.

And rumour said he roamed the rearward ways
In quiet seasons when no battle brewed;
The transport, homing through the evening haze,
Had seen and carried him, and given him food;

And he would leave them at Bethune canteen
Or some hot drinking-house at Nœux-les-Mines,
Where he would sit with wine and eggs and bread
Till the swart minions of the A.P.M.
Stole in and called for him, but found him fled
Out at the back. He was too much for them.

Too much. And surely thou shalt e'er be so;
No hungry discipline shall starve thy soul;
Shalt freely foot it where the poppies blow,
Shalt fight unfettered when the cannon roll,
And haply, Wanderer, when the hosts go home,
Thou only still in Aveluy shalt roam,
Shalt haunt the crumbled Windmill at Gavrelle
And fling thy bombs across the silent lea,
Drink with shy peasants at St. Catherine's Well,
And in the dusk go home with them to tea.

BALLADE OF INCIPIENT LUNACY

Scene.—A Battalion "Orderly" Room in France during a period of "Rest." Runners arrive breathlessly from all directions bearing illegible chits, and tear off in the same directions with illegible answers or no answers at all. Motor-bicycles snort up to the door, and arrogant dispatch-riders enter with enormous envelopes containing leagues of correspondence, orders, minutes, circulars, maps, signals, lists, schedules, summaries, and all sorts. The tables are stacked with papers; the floor is littered with papers; papers fly through the air. Two typewriters click with maddening insistence in a corner. A signaller "buzzes" tenaciously at the telephone, talking in a strange language, apparently to himself, as he never seems to be connected with anyone else. A stream of miscellaneous persons — quartermasters, chaplains, generals, batmen, D.A.D.O.S.'s, sergeant-majors, staff officers, buglers, Maires,

officers just arriving, officers just going away, gas experts, bombing experts, interpreters, doctors—drifts in, wastes time, and drifts out again.

Clerks scribble ceaselessly, rolls and nominal rolls, nominal lists and lists. By the time they have finished one list it is long out of date. Then they start the next. Everything happens at the same time; nobody has time to finish a sentence. Only a military mind, with a very limited descriptive vocabulary and a chronic habit of self-deception, would call the place orderly.

The Adjutant speaks, hoarsely; while he speaks he writes, about something quite different. In the middle of each sentence his pipe goes out; at the end of each sentence he lights a match. He may or may not light his pipe; anyhow he speaks:—

"WHERE is that list of Wesleyans I made?
And what are all those people on the stair?
Is that my pencil? Well, they *can't* be paid.
Tell the Marines we have no forms to spare.
I cannot get these Ration States to square.
The Brigadier is coming round, they say.
The Colonel wants a man to cut his hair.
I think I *must* be going mad to-day.

These silly questions! I shall tell Brigade
This office is now closing for repair.
They want to know what Mr. Johnstone weighed,
And if the Armourer is dark, or fair?
I do not know; I cannot say I care.
Tell that Interpreter to go away.
Where is my signal-pad? I left it there.
I think I *must* be going mad to-day.

Perhaps I should appear upon parade.
Where is my pencil? Ring up Captain Aire;
Say I regret our tools have been mislaid.
These companies would make Sir Douglas swear.
A is the worst. Oh, damn, is this the *Maire*!
I'm sorry, Monsieur—*je suis désolé*—
But no one's pinched your miserable chair.
I think I *must* be going mad to-day."

ENVOI

"Prince, I perceive what Cain's temptations were,
And how attractive it must be to slay.
O Lord, the General! This is hard to bear.
I think I *must* be going mad to-day."

THE REST-RUMOUR

I KNOW not in what rodent-haunted caverns,
By what rough tongues the tale was first expressed,
By choking fires or in the whispering taverns
With wine and omelette lovingly caressed,
Or what tired soul, o'erladen with a lump
Of bombs and bags which some one *had* to hump,
Flung down his load indignant at the Dump
And, cursing, cried, "*It's time we had a rest!*"

And so, maybe, began it. Some sly runner,
Half-hearing, half-imagining, no doubt,
Caught up the word and gave it to a gunner,
And, he embroidering, 'twas noised about
From lip to lip in many a trench's press
Where working-parties struggled to progress
Or else go back, but both without success,
"*Officer says Division's going out.*"

It found the Front. It came up with the rations ;
The Corporals carried it from hole to hole ;
And scouts behaved in strange polemic fashions
On what they thought would be their last patrol ;
While Fritz, of course, from whom few things are hid,
Had the romance as soon as any did,
And said, thank William, he would soon be rid
Of yon condemned disturbers of his soul.

Nor were there few confirming little trifles,
For James, rejoining from the Base, had scann'd
Strange waiting infantry, with brand-new rifles,
In backward areas, but close at hand ;
And some had marked the D.A.Q.M.G.
Approaching Railhead in the dusk, and he
(Who, as a fact, was simply on the spree)
Had gone, of course, to view the Promised Land.

And what a land ! Who had not heard its promise ?
A land of quietude and no grenades,

Soft beds for officers, fair barns for Tommies,
And rich *estaminets* and gracious maids,
And half an hour from Abbeville by the train,
A land of rivulets and golden grain
(Where it would be impossible to train
And even difficult to have parades)!

Then it appeared the groom of General Harrison
Had news denied to ordinary men,
How the Brigade was going home to garrison
A restful corner of the Lincoln fen;
But weeks have passed, and we are as we were;
And possibly, when Peace is in the air
And these dear myths have died of sheer despair,
They may come true—but not, I think, till then.

A LOST LEADER

Or, Thoughts on Trek

THE men are marching like the best;
 The waggons wind across the lea;
At ten to two we have a rest,
 We have a rest at ten to three;
 I ride ahead upon my gee
And try to look serene and gay;
 The whole battalion follows me,
And I believe I've lost the way.

Full many a high-class thoroughfare
 My erring map does not disclose,
While roads that are not really there
 The same elaborately shows;
 And whether this is one of those
It needs a clever man to say;
 I am not clever, I suppose,
And I believe I've lost the way.

The soldiers sing about their beer;
 The wretched road goes on and on;
There ought to be a turning here,
 But if there was the thing has gone;

Like some depressed automaton
I ask at each *estaminet*;
They say, "*Tout droit*," and I say "*Bon*,"
But I believe I've lost the way.

I dare not tell the trustful men;
They think me wonderful and wise;
But where will be the legend when
They get a shock of such a size?
And what about our brave Allies?
They wanted us to fight to-day;
We were to be a big surprise—
And I believe I've lost the way.

THE INCORRIGIBLES

How an exasperated Adjutant would LIKE *to address the New Guard*

"GUARD! for I still concede to you the title,
Though well I know that it is not your due,
Being devoid of everything most vital
To the high charge which is imposed on you;
Listen awhile—and, Number Two, be dumb;
Forbear to scratch the irritable tress;
No longer masticate the furtive gum;
And, Private Pitt, stop nibbling at your thumb,
But for a change attend to my address.

Day after day I urge the old, old thesis—
To reverence well the man of martial note,
Nor treat as mere sartorial caprices
The mystic marks he carries on his coat,
And how to know what everybody is,
The swords, the crowns, the purple-stained cards,

The Brigadiers concealed in Burberries,
And render all those pomps and dignities
Which are, of course, the *raison d'être* of guards.

With what avail? for never a guard is mounted
That does not do some wild abhorrent thing,
Only in hushed low tones to be recounted,
Lest haply hints of it should reach the King—
Dark ugly tales of sentinels who drank,
Or lost their prisoners while consuming tea,
Or took great pains to make their minds a blank
Whene'er approached by gentlemen of rank,
And, when reproved, presented arms to me!

There is no potentate in France or Flanders
You will not heap with insult if you can.
For lo! a car. It is the Corps Commander's;
The sentries take no notice of the man,
Or fix him with a not unkindly stare,
And slap their butts in an engaging way,
Or else, too late, in penitent despair
Cry, 'Guard, turn out!' and there is no guard there,
But they are in *The Blue Estaminet.*

Weary I am of worrying and warning;
For all my toil I get it in the neck;
I am fed up with it; and from this morning
I shall not seek to keep your crimes in check;
Sin as you will—I shall but acquiesce;
Sleep on, O sentinels—I shall not curse;
And so, maybe, from sheer contrariness
Some day a guard may be a slight success;
At any rate you cannot well do worse."

AT THE DUMP

Lines to the N.C.O. in charge

Now is the hour of dusk and mist and midges,
 Now the tired planes drone homeward through the haze,
And distant wood-fires wink behind the ridges,
 And the first flare some timorous Hun betrays ;
Now no shell circulates, but all men brood
 Over their evening food ;
The bats flit warily, and owl and rat
 With muffled cries their shadowy loves pursue,
And pleasant, Corporal, it is to chat
 In this hushed moment with a man like you.

How strange a spectacle of human passions
 Is yours all day beside the Arras road,
What mournful men concerned about their rations
 When here at eve the limbers leave their load,

What twilight blasphemy, what horses' feet
Entangled with the meat,
What sudden hush when that machine-gun sweeps,
And—flat as possible for men so round—
The Quartermasters may be seen in heaps,
While you sit still and chuckle, I'll be bound!

Here all men halt awhile and tell their rumours;
Here the young runners come to cull your tales,
How Generals talked with you, in splendid humours,
And how the Worcestershires have gone to Wales;
Up yonder trench each lineward regiment swings,
Saying some shocking things;
And here at dark sad diggers stand in hordes
Waiting the late elusive Engineer,
While glowing pipes illume yon notice-boards
That say, "No LIGHTS. YOU MUST NOT LOITER HERE."

And you sit ruminant and take no action,
But daylong watch the aeroplanes at play,
Or contemplate with secret satisfaction
Your fellow-men proceeding towards the fray,

Your sole solicitude when men report
There is a shovel short,
Or, numbering jealously your rusty store,
Some mouldering rocket, some wet bomb you miss
That was reserved for some ensuing war,
But on no grounds to be employed in this.

For Colonels cringe to you, most firm of warders,
For sandbags suppliant, and do no good,
And high Staff Officers and priests in orders
In vain beleaguer you for bits of wood,
While I, who have nor signature nor chit,
But badly want a bit,
I only talk to you of these high themes,
Nor stoop to join the sycophantic choir,
Seeing (I trust) my wicked batman, Jeames,
Has meanwhile pinched enough to light my fire.

THE BATTLE OF CODSON'S BEARD

I'LL tell you a yarn of a sailor-man, with a
face more fierce than fair,
Who got round that on the Navy's plan by
hiding it all with hair;
He was one of a hard old sailor-breed, and
had lived his life at sea,
But he took to the beach at the nation's need,
and fought with the R.N.D.

Now Brigadier-General Blank's Brigade was
tidy and neat and trim,
And the sight of a beard on *his* parade was a
bit too much for him:
"What is that," said he, with a frightful oath,
"of all that is wild and weird?"
And the Staff replied, "A curious growth, but
it looks very like a beard."

And the General said, "I have seen six wars,
and many a ghastly sight,
Fellows with locks that gave one shocks, and
buttons none too bright,

But never a man in *my* Brigade with a face
all fringed with fur;
And you'll toddle away and shave to-day."
But Codson said, "*You err.*

For I don't go much on wars, as such, and
living with rats and worms,
And you ought to be glad of a sailor lad on
any old kind of terms;
While this old beard of which you're skeered,
it stands for a lot to me,
For the great North gales, and the sharks and
whales, and the smell of the dear grey
sea."

New Generals crowded to the spot and urged
him to behave,
But Codson said, "You talk a lot, but can
you *make* me shave?
For the Navy allows a beard at the bows, and
a beard is the sign for me,
That the world may know wherever I go, I
belong to the King's Navee."

They gave him posts in distant parts where
few might see his face,
Town-Major jobs that break men's hearts,
and billets at the Base;

But whenever he knew a fight was due, he
hurried there by train,
And when he'd done for every Hun—they
sent him back again.

Then up and spake an old sailor, " It seems
you can't 'ave 'eared,
Begging your pardon, General Blank, the
reason of this same beard :
It's a kind of a sart of a *camyflarge*, and that
I take to mean
A thing as 'ides some other thing wot
oughtn't to be seen.

And I've brought you this 'ere photergraph
of what 'e *used* to be
Before 'e stuck that fluffy muck about 'is
phyzogmy."
The General looked and, fainting, cried, " The
situation's grave !
The beard was bad, but, KAMERAD ! he
simply must not shave ! "

And now, when the thin lines bulge and sag,
and man goes down to man,
A great black beard like a pirate's flag flies
ever in the van ;
And I've fought in many a warmish spot,
where death was the least men feared,
But I never knew anything quite so hot as
the Battle of Codson's Beard.

AFTER THE BATTLE

So they are satisfied with our Brigade,
And it remains to parcel out the bays!
And we shall have the usual Thanks Parade,
The beaming General, and the soapy praise.

You will come up in your capacious car
To find your heroes sulking in the rain,
To tell us how magnificent we are,
And how you hope we'll do the same again.

And we, who knew your old abusive tongue,
Who heard you hector us a week before,
We who have bled to boost you up a rung—
A K.C.B. perhaps, perhaps a Corps ——,

We who must mourn those spaces in the Mess,
And somehow fill the hollows in the heart,
We do not want your Sermon on Success,
Your greasy benisons on Being Smart.

We only want to take our wounds away
To some warm village where the tumult ends,
And drowsing in the sunshine many a day,
Forget our aches, forget that we had friends.

Weary we are of blood and noise and pain ;
This was a week we shall not soon forget ;
And if, indeed, we have to fight again,
We little wish to think about it yet.

We have done well ; we like to hear it said.
Say it, and then, for God's sake, say no more.
Fight, if you must, fresh battles far ahead,
But keep them dark behind your château door !

OPEN WARFARE

Men said, " At last ! at last the open battle !
Now shall we fight unfettered o'er the plain,
No more in catacombs be cooped like cattle,
Nor travel always in a devious drain ! "
They were in ecstasies. But I was damping ;
I like a trench, I have no lives to spare ;
And in those catacombs, however cramping,
You did at least know vaguely where you were.

Ah, happy days in deep well-ordered alleys,
Where, after dining, probably with wine,
One felt indifferent to hostile sallies,
And with a pipe meandered round the line ;
You trudged along a trench until it ended—
It led at least to some familiar spot—
It might not be the place that you'd intended,
But then you might as well be there as not.

But what a wilderness we now inhabit
Since this confounded " open " strife prevails !
It may be good ; I do not wish to crab it,
But you should hear the language it entails—

Should see this waste of wide uncharted craters
Where it is vain to seek the Companies,
Seeing the shell-holes are as like as taters
And no one knows where anybody is.

Oft in the darkness, palpitant and blowing,
Have I set out and lost the hang of things,
And ever thought, "Where *can* that guide be going?"
But trusted long and rambled on in rings,
For ever mounting some tremendous summit,
And halting there to curse the contrite guide,
For ever then descending like a plummet
Into a chasm on the other side.

Oft have I sat and wept, or sought to study
With hopeless gaze the uninstructive stars,
Hopeless because the very skies were muddy—
I only saw a red malignant Mars;
Or pulled my little compass out and pondered,
And set it sadly on my shrapnel hat,
Which, I suppose, was why the needle wandered,
Only, of course, I never thought of that.

And then, perhaps, some 5·9's start dropping,
As if there weren't sufficient holes about;
I flounder on, hysterical and sopping,
And come by chance to where I started out,

And say once more, while I have no objection
To other men proceeding to Berlin,
Give *me* a trench, a nice revetted section,
And let me stay there till the Boche gives in!

THE REVELATION

An uncommon end to a common adventure

How sweet, when one is worn with walking
To find a billet fit for Zeus,
A solid roof that needs no caulking,
And sheets unsoiled by previous use!
And so I thought as up some twistful turning
I sought my bed beyond the lighted barns,
Where in their straw the soldiers sat
And smoked and cursed and chewed and spat,
Or filled the firmament with songs of yearning,
And the low buzz of unsubstantial yarns.

These villages are most misleading,
And coming soon where ways entwine
It really was a trifle feeding
To find I knew not which was mine.
"Courage," I said, and pointed to the steeple,
"An ivied cottage, and the church was near."
I blundered round from latch to latch;
Fast fizzled out my final match;
And all the world was full of testy people,
With one remark, "*You cannot sleep in here.*"

Hours passed. The rats came out to pillage,
And now the barns were dark and dumb,
But still I roamed the murky village,
And wondered when the dawn would come.
The moon went in ; I fell into a midden,
And, musing there, a low sound stirred my bones,
A strange compelling syren-song,
The same that leads the ships along,
When fogs are fall'n and all the havens hidden—
Surely I knew those gentlemanly tones !

But when I sought the friendly cadence—
As in some lone sequestered pool
A Faun descries the Naiad maidens
And feels his conduct rather cool,
Or some low minion of the Dalai Llama's
In shock'd amaze discovers by mistake
Some very secret mysteries
He knows are no concern of his—
With so much awe I saw the chaste pyjamas
Of General Jenkins—palpably awake !

I will not here repeat the matter
Of what he thought it right to say,
But though he did not stoop to flatter
I never now regret the day.

And at reviews I even stand and chortle,
 Where whole Brigades hang motionless and
 mute;
 When Colonels cringe before his glance
 I only feel inclined to dance,
For only I remember he is mortal—
 Who saw the Titan in his sleeping-suit.

BEAUCOURT REVISITED

I WANDERED up to Beaucourt; I took the river track,
And saw the lines we lived in before the Boche went back;
But Peace was now in Pottage, the front was far ahead,
The front had journeyed Eastward, and only left the dead.

And I thought, How long we lay there, and watched across the wire,
While the guns roared round the valley, and set the skies afire!
But now there are homes in HAMEL and tents in the Vale of Hell,
And a camp at Suicide Corner, where half a regiment fell.

The new troops follow after, and tread the land we won,
To them 'tis so much hill-side re-wrested from the Hun,

We only walk with reverence this sullen mile of mud ;
The shell-holes hold our history, and half of them our blood.

Here, at the head of Pêche Street, 'twas death to show your face,
To me it seemed like magic to linger in the place ;
For me how many spirits hung round the Kentish Caves,
But the new men see no spirits—they only see the graves.

I found the half-dug ditches we fashioned for the fight,
We lost a score of men there—young James was killed that night ;
I saw the star shells staring, I heard the bullets hail,
But the new troops pass unheeding—they never heard the tale.

I crossed the blood-red ribbon, that once was No-Man's Land,
I saw a misty daybreak and a creeping minute-hand ;

And here the lads went over, and there was Harmsworth shot,
And here was William lying—but the new men know them not.

And I said, " There is still the river, and still the stiff, stark trees,
To treasure here our story, but there are only these " ;
But under the white wood crosses the dead men answered low,
" The new men know not BEAUCOURT, but we are here—we know."

THE RUNNER

The village rocks and the hot shells shower,
A maxim plays on the Arras Road;
The host lies hid and the boldest cower,
And even the Red Cross risk no load.
But word must go to the watching gunner,
The long line waits and the word *must* go;
The wires are cut, and it means a runner
Must walk through Hell while the rest lie low.

Black and green and an evil yellow
Over the path the monsters rain.
Wait awhile for the next big fellow,
Up, then, over and down again!
Down in a hole like a hunted cony—
That was nearly a Blighty one!
Skirt that bit by the dead pack-pony,
Over the road and the worst is done.

Back then, staggering, crouching, creeping—
Not that way by the limber—look!
The dead lie there like a regiment sleeping—
That was the way the first lad took.

And it's easy to hide where none will find you,
 Easy to say you missed the track,
There's a dug-out there in the bank behind you—
 Easy? ah, yes, but you do come back.

The line moves on and a trench is taken—
 The stout-hearts carry the craven through;
And many are tired and many shaken,
 Yet a man does there as his neighbours do.
But nobody knows how *you* are faring,
 Nobody saw that narrow shave;
There's nobody near to *make* you daring,
 Only yourself to say "Be brave."

For we sit safe at the battle's borders,
 And send you forth like a faithful hound,
Praying the troops may have their orders,
 Crying, the right man *must* be found.
And the Kings may plan and the guns may thunder,
 And over the plain the swords pursue;
It is all for nothing if you go under—
 For the battle waits, and it waits for you.

THE INVESTITURE

Be silent, guns ! for Basil is invested,
And wheresoe'er the slaves of strife are found
Let your grim offices be now arrested,
Nor the hot rifle shoot another round,
Nor the pale flarelights toss,
But for a space all devilry be barred,
While Mars hangs motionless in pleased regard
And the hushed lines look West to Palace Yard,
Where on his breast our King has pinned the Cross.

Oft in the Mess have we rehearsed that moment,
In old French farms have staged the Royal Square,
Or in cool caves by Germans made at Beaumont,
Though there indeed we had no space to spare,
So lifelike was it all,

And when King George (the Padre's hard
to beat
In that great rôle), surrounded by his suite,
Pinned on the cover of the potted meat,
The very Hippodrome had seemed too small.

Or we would act the homing of our Hector,
Flushed up with pride beneath the ancestral
fir,
The cheering rustics and the sweet old Rector,
Welcoming back " our brave parishioner " ;
And since the lad was shy
We made him get some simple phrases pat
To thank them for the Presentation Bat,
While Maud stood near (the Adjutant did
that),
So overcome that she could only sigh.

Ah ! Basil, say our pageants were not wasted,
Not vain the Adjutant's laborious blush !
Was it to Maud this glowing morn you hasted
With yonder bauble in its bed of plush—
Or was it that Miss Blake ?
Say not you faced, with ill-concealed
dismay,
Your thronging townsmen and had nought
to say,
Or from your King stepped tremblingly
away
With some one else's Order by mistake !

Surely you shamed us not! for all that splendour
Can scarce have been more moving to the heart
Than our glad rites, the Princess not so tender
As was myself, who always took that part;
I cannot think the King,
Nor gorgeous Lords, nor Officers of State,
Nor seedy people peering through the gate,
Felt half so proud or so affectionate
As those far friends when *we* arranged the thing.

THE ATROCITY

(The following lines have no personal reference, but are in principle, *mutatis mutandis*, of regrettably wide application.)

O God of War, is this the end ?
 O Mars, who made the shameful Hun !
Is this the final shame you send
 To show us we have nearly won ?
 A thing that fairly takes the bun,
That turns our golden deeds to dross.
 O Vimy Ridge and O Verdun—
The A.D.C. has got the Cross !

Because he caught a rotten chill,
 Because he had to ring the bells,
And oft from some convenient hill
 Distinctly heard the sound of shells ;
 Because he was the son of swells,
Because he was compelled to doss
 In quite indifferent hotels—
The A.D.C. has got the Cross !

He never saw the tiniest louse
 (Or thought the creature was a gnat),
But little jobs about the house
 Were what the lad was gallant at;
 And since he made himself a mat
To wipe the boots of any boss,
 And since they like a man like that—
The A.D.C. has got the Cross!

Because he bought the right cigars,
 And last December got wet through,
And had to drive in draughty cars,
 And speak when he was spoken to,
 And soon perceived it wasn't true
That rolling logs collect no moss,
 And stuck to generals like glue—
The A.D.C. has got the Cross!

O hero hosts who bleed and sweat,
 Whose names the King will never ken,
Be calm; you may be butlers yet—
 Two mentions per six hundred men
 Must satisfy your souls till then;
And why should soldiers care a toss
 For all the medals minted, when
The A.D.C. has got the Cross?

THE BALLAD OF JONES'S BLIGHTY

THERE are some men who dwell for years
 Within the battle's hem,
Almost impervious, it appears,
 To shot or stratagem;
Some well-intentioned sprite contrives
By hook or crook to save their lives
(It also keeps them from their wives),
 And Jones was one of them.

The hugest bolts of Messrs. Krupp
 Hissed harmless through his hair;
The Boche might blow his billet up,
 But he would be elsewhere;
And if with soul-destroying thud
A monstrous Minnie hit the mud,
The thing was sure to be a dud
 If only Jones was there.

Men envied him his scathless skin,
 But he deplored the fact,
And day by day, from sheer chagrin,
 He did some dangerous act;

He slew innumerable Huns,
He captured towns, he captured guns:
His friends went home with Blighty ones,
 But he remained intact.

We had a horse of antique shape,
 Meek and of mellowed age,
And, after some unique escape,
 Which made him mad with rage,
On this grave steed Jones rode away . . .
They bore him back at break of day,
And Jones is now with Mrs. J.—
 The convalescent stage.

The world observed the chance was droll
 That sent so mild a hack
To smite the invulnerable soul
 Whom William could not whack;
But spiteful folk remarked, of course,
He must have used terrific force
Before he got that wretched horse
 To throw him off its back.

THE TRENCH CODE

Ah! with what awe, what infantile impatience,
We eyed the artifice when issued out,
And racked our brains about the Regulations,
And tried to think we had them free from doubt,
As Rome's old Fathers, reverently leaning
In secret cellars o'er the Sibyl's strain,
Beyond the fact that several pars
Had something vague to do with Mars,
Failed, as a rule, to find the smallest meaning,
But told the plebs the oracle was plain!

So did we study it, ourselves deceiving,
In hope to say, "We have no rations here,"
Or "Please, Brigade, this regiment wants relieving,"
And "Thank you for the bombs—but why no beer?"
And wondered always, with a hint of presage,
Since never a word emerged as it was planned,
If it was Hermes, Lord of Craft,
Compiled the code, or some one daft,
So that no mortal could compose a message
Which anybody else could understand.

Too soon the Staff, to spoil our tiny slumbers,
Or, as they said, to certify our skill,
Sent us a screed, all signs and magic numbers,
And what it signified is mystery still.
We flung them back a message yet more mazy
To say we weren't unravelling their own,
And marked it *Urgent*, and designed
That it should reach them while they dined.
All night they toiled, till half the crowd were crazy
And bade us breathe its burthen o'er the 'phone.

.

But now they want it back—*and it is missing!*
And shall one patriot heart withhold a throb?
For four high officers have been here, hissing,
And plainly panicky about their job.
I know they think some dark, deluded bandit
Has gone and given it to Kaiser Bill;
But though I'm grieved the General's cross,
I have no qualms about the loss—
If clever men like us can't understand it,
I don't suppose the Wilhelmstrasse will!

THE COMING OF PEACE

How will it be in Flanders when Peace comes like a blow—
Comes on a weary daybreak along the startled wires
To where the grimy regiments sit on in slime and snow,
And the rich fumes of bacon hang round the hissing fires?

How will it seem when sudden there are no noises there,
Save when from backward cities are heard the tumbling bells,
Or some reluctant sniper forsakes his matted lair
To fire across the open incredulous farewells?

But the loud guns are silent, and up the Sunken Way
The jingling teams come gaily to limber up their lords,

With new-born dreams of Dorset and light
work in the hay,
When foolish men for ever have sheathed
their foolish swords.

And in the fetid alleys men buckle on their
loads,
And wind away to Westward along the
wooden track,
Wind singing round the shell-holes and up the
pitted roads,
And turn upon the hill-top to take a long
look back—

Look back beyond the crosses star-spread
about the lines,
And, looking, feel beside them their dead at
last released
To see with them the sun rise above the
broken shrines,
And hear the German waggons roll back
into the East.

But lonesome in the trenches the grey rat
walks and grieves,
Nor ever an English ration rewards his
night-patrols,
And the shy birds come slowly to nest in the
dug-out eaves,
And crowding round the sand-bags red
poppies hide the holes.

And stooping, from the cities, come soon the peasant crones
To hunt for vanished homesteads across the withered plain ;
Pale children play at battle about the hamlets' bones,
And old men come with ploughshares to turn the fields again.

THE HUMILIATION OF THE PALFREY

WHERE is she now, the pride of the battalion,
That ambled always at the Colonel's side,
A fair white steed, like some majestic galleon
Which takes deliberate the harbour tide,
So soft, so slow, she scarcely seems to stir?
And that, indeed, was very true of her
Who was till late, so kind her character,
The only horse the Adjutant could ride.

Ever she led the regiment on its journeys,
And held sweet converse with the Colonel's gee,
Of knights, no doubt, and old heroic tourneys,
And how she bare great ladies o'er the lea;
And on high hill-sides, when the men felt dead,
Far up the height they viewed her at the head,
A star of hope, and shook themselves, and said,
"If she can do it, dammit, so can we!"

But she was old, my Adjutantial palfrey.
In front no longer but in rear to-day,
Behind the bicycles, and not at all free
To be familiar with the General's grey,
She walks in shame with all those misanthropes,
The sad pack-animals who have no hopes,
But must by men be led about on ropes,
Condemned till death to carry S.A.A.,

And bombs, and beef, and officers' valises;
And I at eve have marked my wistful mare
By thronging dumps where cursing never ceases
And rations come, for oft she brings them there,
Patient, aloof; and when the shrapnel dropp'd
And the young mules complained and kicked and hopp'd,
She only stood unmoved, with one leg propp'd,
As if she heard it not or did not care;

Or heard, maybe, but hoped to get a Blighty;
For on her past she lately seemed to brood
And dreamed herself once more among the mighty,
By grooms beloved and reverently shoed;

But now she has no standing in the corps,
And Death itself would hardly be a bore,
Save that, although she carries me no more,
'Tis something still to carry up my food.

"THE CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY"

("These, aided by their staffs and assistants, convey his will to —— subordinates under them, each of whom carries it down still lower, until eventually all ranks are controlled by it."—*Field Service Regulations.*)

All night the tempest howled about the camp,
And through the tent flaps filtered in the damp.
The Brigadier woke up and saw no sun;
His eggs were cold; his bacon was not done;
And, to express his reasonable pique
At being born into a world so bleak,
He spake as tartly as a General can
To Major Thingummy, his right-hand man;
Who, well aware no negligence of his
Deserved just then these high-toned blasphemies,
Took horse and galloped with a heart in flame
Till he encountered Colonel Whatshisname;
To whom in terms not reverent but frank,
Such as to persons of superior rank,
But not upon the Staff, the Staff may use,
The Major stingingly expressed his views

On how the Colonel or his dastard force
Had for a week possessed an extra horse.
The Colonel lamblike heard the harsh critique
(He simply could not trust himself to speak),
But, spurring home, not lamblike in the least,
Addressed his Adjutant about the beast;
Who, hushed and hurt, confessed the horrid crime
(But knew his chief had known it all the time),
Went out and sought for somebody to err,
And found, of course, the Transport Officer,
A happy person, who from day to day
Did all his duties in the wrongest way—
Yet, gentle youth, however wild his whim,
Not often people could be cross with him.
But, in this case, so mortified his mind,
The Adjutant was *pleased* to be unkind.
The astonished victim, on the hallowed plan,
Relieved his feelings on the nearest man,
And duly visited with words of doom
An unattractive but contented groom,
With tuneful sibilance and studious care
Engaged in polishing the surplus mare;
His whistle finished, and with needless force
He raised his boot and kicked the smiling horse
Under the belly,—and it smiled no more . . .
And one more day was added to the War.

TO THE REGIMENT

A Christmas Message

So Christmas comes and finds you yet in Flanders,
And all is mud and messiness and sleet,
And men have temperatures and horses glanders,
And Brigadiers have trouble with their feet,
And life is bad for Company-Commanders,
And even Thomas's is not so sweet.

Now cooks for kindle-wood would give great riches,
And in the dixies the pale stew congeals,
And ration-parties are not free from hitches,
But all night circle like performing seals,
Till morning breaks and everybody pitches
Into a hole some other person's meals.

Now regiments huddle over last week's ashes,
And pray for coal and sedulously " rest "

Where rain and wind contemn the empty
sashes,
And blue lips frame the faint heroic jest,
Till some near howitzer goes off and smashes
The only window that the town possessed.

The lean mule strains, the limbers lip
crevasses,
And roads are black with cookers in the
ditch;
And men sleep warmlier who sleep in masses,
And peers confess the not inglorious itch,
Or get, like teeth, extracted from morasses—
Nor could their Ma's distinguish which is
which.

Yet somehow Christmas in your souls is
stirring,
And Colonels now less viciously upbraid
Their Transport Officers, however erring,
And sudden signals issue from Brigade
To say next Tuesday Christmas is occurring,
And what arrangements have Battalions
made?

And then, maybe, while every one discusses
On what rich foods their dear commands
shall dine,
And (most efficiently) the Padre fusses
About the birds, the speeches, and the wine,

The Corps Commander sends a fleet of buses
To whisk you off to Christmas in the line.

You make no moan, nor hint at how you're faring,
And here in turn we try to hide our woe,
With taxis mutinous, and Tubes so wearing,
And who can tell where all the matches go?
And all our doors and windows want repairing,
But can we get a man to mend them? No.

The dustman visits not; we can't get castor;
In vain are parlour-maids and plumbers sought;
And human intellect can scarcely master
The time when beer may lawfully be bought,
Or calculate how cash can go much faster,
And if one's butcher's acting as he ought.

Our old indulgences are now not cricket;
Whate'er one does *some* Minister will cuss;
In Tube and Tram young ladies punch one's ticket,
With whom one can't be cross or querulous;—
All things are different, but still we stick it,
And humbly hope we help a little thus.

So, Fellow-sufferers, we give you greeting—
 All luck, all laughter, and an end of wars!
And just to strengthen you for Fritz's beating,
 I'm sending out a parcel from the Stores;
They mean to stop my annual over-eating,
 But it will comfort me to think of yours.

ZERO

(" *Zero-hour* "—*commonly known as* " *Zero* " —*is the hour fixed for the opening of an Infantry attack.*)

I WOKE at dawn and flung the window wide.
Behind the hedge the lazy river ran;
The dusky barges idled down the tide;
In the laburnum tree the birds began;
And it was May, and half the world in flower;
I saw the sun creep over an Eastward brow,
And thought, " It may be, this is Zero-hour;
Somewhere the lads are 'going over' now."

Somewhere the guns speak sudden on the height,
And build for miles their battlement of fire;
Somewhere the men that shivered all the night
Peer anxious forth and scramble through the wire,

Swarm slowly out to where the Maxims bark,
And green and red the panic rockets rise ;
And Hell is loosed, and shyly sings a lark,
And the red sun climbs sadly up the skies.

Now they have won some sepulchred Gavrelle,
Some shattered homes in their own dust concealed ;
Now no Boche troubles them nor any shell,
But almost quiet holds the thankful field,
While men draw breath, and down the Arras road
Come the slow mules with battle's dreary stores,
And there is time to see the wounded stowed,
And stretcher-squads besiege the doctors' doors.

Then belches Hell anew. And all day long
The afflicted place drifts heavenward in dust,
All day the shells shriek out their devils' song,
All day men cling close to the earth's charred crust,
Till, in the dusk, the Huns come on again,
And, like some sluice, the watchers up the hill
Let loose the guns and flood the soil with slain,
And they go back, but scourge the village still.

I see it all. I see the same brave souls
To-night, to-morrow, though the half be gone,
Deafened and dazed, and hunted from their holes,
Helpless and hunger-sick, but holding on;
I shall be happy all to-morrow here,
But not till night shall they go up the steep,
And, nervous now because the end is near,
Totter at last to quietness and to sleep.

And men who find it easier to forget
In England here, among the daffodils,
That Eastward there are fields unflowered yet,
And murderous May-days on the unlovely hills—
Let them go walking where the land is fair,
And watch the breaking of a morn in May,
And think, "It may be Zero over there,
But here is Peace"—and kneel awhile, and pray.

THE SWAN-SONG OF THE BAVARIANS

LIKE some swift engine screaming through the tunnels,
Or like North-Easters when they whip the main
And the frail fishing-fleet engulf their gunwales,
Or like some large bull-elephant in pain,
All night our shells had shrieked and hissed and roared,
And vain was converse, and of course it poured—
Yet hark! above the storm, a harsh, high chord!
What melody was that? what wild unearthly strain?

It was the sound of German soldiers singing
A song of triumph in the tortured mire—
A song of revelry, with gas-shells flinging
Their witchery round, and Maxims coughing fire;

For now, affronted at the breach of taste,
We snatched our arms and scrupulously placed
Bombs, bullets, biscuits, beef across the waste—
But never a moment ceased that shrill ecstatic choir.

Thereat—as when, in some suburban Crescent,
Soft music steals from Number Seventeen,
And they next door, to whom it is not pleasant,
Hammer the walls to advertise their spleen,
Or rack in turn their reedy throats and bray
With envious din to drown that roundelay:
Far off at Barnes the housewives hear, and pray,
And the babe wakes and wails in tranquil Turnham Green—

We also bawled our Blighty über Alles,
The pitmen howled their "Watch upon the Tyne";
With ribald hymns we shocked the rearward valleys,
And the loud guns were hushed into a whine.

Brigade rang up to know about the noise :
We said, " It seems that Hindenburg employs
Some corps composed exclusively of boys,
That with immense moral has just relieved the line."

But prisoners since have told the sad true story,
Who in those burrows where the Hun was hived
Were prisoned many a day, begirt with glory
But faint with hunger, for no food survived,
While, night by night, the trembling carrier-crews,
Fleeing the fire that blocked all avenues,
Had dropped their priceless burdens in the dews,
But on this eve, at last ! the rations *had* arrived.

And so they sang. Nor knew that on the morrow
Our sullen waves would surge across to fight,
To change that pæan to a chant of sorrow,
And mar for good that matchless appetite.

And yet—as murderers in the damnèd
cell
At the last breakfast are supposed to
dwell
On fair rich foods, and do extremely
well—
Poor Fritz, I like to feel he had a meal that
night.

THE MISCHIEF-MAKERS

Ah me, how peaceful was the sector,
How like a home these trenches were,
Where never a Hun would hate or hector,
And only swallows cleft the air;
Where always poppies blew above the lines,
And little mice ran shyly through the corn;
Where food was frequent, with expensive wines,
And Sam Browne belts were worn.

And if through some ingenious crevice
We marked a head of hostile type,
We neither harassed him with "heavies"
Nor fired our telescopic hyp.;
But rather, like some rare and precious prize,
Preserved the man, and showed him to the Staff,
Who looked at him with large important eyes,
But did no sort of strafe.

And he, detecting any Tommies,
Regarded them with some disdain,
But seldom spoiled their youthful promise,
Nor caused them any needless pain;

While, if at night inimical patrols
By some mischance came sudden face to face,
They glowered fiercely from adjacent holes,
But nothing else took place.

And then, from some polemic quarter,
Some very earnest camp in Kent,
Came out, alack! a baleful mortar,
With crowds of men on murder bent;
Radiant they came because the drills were done,
With stacks of shells and valour all too vast—
They only longed to load their blessed gun
And let it off at last.

We told them how the Hun was purring,
But would not be if they began;
We said their shells, however erring,
Were certain to annoy the man;
We showed them spots more worthy of their arts
Far on the flank or far away in rear;
We said they swarmed in other people's parts,
But there were none just here.

But it was vain. With grieved impatience
They hid themselves in some huge trough,
Interred their gun with incantations,
And madly loosed the monster off.

Straight on the sound, while yet the great
bomb boomed,
Five awful Minnies whistled down the
wind,
And men for miles immediately assumed
A hostile frame of mind.

Observers woke and peered through prisms,
And every sort of specialist
Produced his hideous mechanisms,
And made it penal to exist.
The sniper snipes, impervious to appeals,
Immense projectiles hurtle to and from,
And no one now can count upon his meals—
Even the bombers bomb.

It may be they will one day leave us—
Their stock of shells may sometimes cease,
And this charred region, now so grievous,
May see some slight return of peace ;
But never quite can hate be banished hence,
'Twill never be the old good-natured zone,
Where war was war, but people had some
sense—
The place has lost its tone.

THE ROMANCERS

(The *New Statesman* complains that War Correspondents are not sufficiently realistic.)

Ah! no, you hardly catch the thunder,
But still in that familiar mode,
Reiterate with childlike wonder
That guns go off and shells explode;
Still simple seem, as penned in your report,
These desperate movements of a million men,
As who should say, "They got in at Earl's Court,
And came to High Street, Ken."

We weary of that land of banter
Where armies dwell in one long purr,
When not assaulting, at the canter,
By methods which can scarcely err;
We do not share your manifest surprise
That wounded men, receding from the fray,
Should not come down with sorrow in their eyes
But be a little gay;

We want to hear of human terrors,
The tactics which turned out a frost,
The men who made enormous errors,
The working-parties nobly lost:
Tell us of rations which did not arrive,
Of cookers ditched and mules that are no more,
And let us think *one* Boche is still alive
To carry on the war.

We want to hear the homely details
Of how men wash in shrapnel-hats,
The kind of beer the Frenchman retails
And what they do about the rats,
And not those super-myths, the " boys " who bask
In seas of shells or frolic in the mud,
And, at the end, invariably ask
For further deeds of blood.

And yet, as your romances worsen
I do not hold you most to blame,
For that imaginative person,
The British private, makes the same;
And when I read how proud you were to speak
" With certain units resting in their barns,"
I seem to see them, every tongue in cheek,
Filling you up with yarns.

"AT DAWN"

'E WASN'T like us lucky ones
'Oo thinks of nothing much but beer,
Though 'e was mad to meet the 'Uns
(They always is until they're 'ere);
It's 'ard to think of 'ow 'e's gorn,
And 'ow I've joked with Bill and 'im
About us getting shot at dorn,
And now it's 'appened—and to Jim!

There's some as can't 'elp feeling fear,
And some as don't know what it is,
And why *they* get the Cross out 'ere
Is one of Gawd's own mysteries;
And 'ow 'e stuck it as 'e did
But never 'ad a smell of such;—
'E was as keen as any kid,
But 'e imagined things too much.

And when it came to stunts—*'e ran,*
And chucked away 'is blooming life.
They say 'e took it like a man,
But that don't seem to 'elp 'is wife:

She might 'ave dreamed 'er soldier-lad
'Ad copped a packet full of pride
Like 'arf the regiment, fighting mad—
But Gawd! they've told 'er 'ow 'e died.

PATROLS

The Scout Officer soliloquizes :—

" The lights begin to leap along the lines,
Leap up and hang and swoop and sputter out ;
A bullet hits a wiring-post and whines ;
I wish to God that I was not a Scout !

How fair it seemed in far-off Dorset days
To leave my envious fellows at their drill,
To seek adventure in the forest ways,
And follow footsteps over Badbury Hill ;

Or in a fight to spy upon the foe
With reckless courage from the oak-tree's heart,
To stalk some sentinel and lay him low,
Or slip past pickets in the grocer's cart !

Ah, those were days. And then I loved the
trade;
Far other is this battle in the waste,
Wherein, each night, though not of course
afraid,
I wriggle round with ill-concealed distaste,

Where who can say what menace is not nigh,
What ambushed foe, what unexploded
crump,
And the glad worm, aspiring to the sky,
Emerges suddenly and makes you jump.

Where either all is still,—so still one feels
That something huge must presently ex-
plode,—
And back, far back, is heard the noise of
wheels
From Prussian waggons on the Douai road;

And flares shoot upward with a startling hiss
And fall, and flame intolerably close,
So that it seems no living man could miss—
How huge my head must look, my legs how
gross!—

Or the live air is full of droning hums
And cracking whips and whispering snakes
of fire,
And a loud buzz of conversation comes
From Simpson's party putting out some wire;

Or else—as when some soloist is done
And the hushed orchestra may now begin—
A sudden rage inflames the placid Hun
And scouts lie naked in a world of din.

The sullen bomb dissolves in singing shapes;
The whizz-bang jostles it—too fast to flee;
Machine-guns chatter like demented apes—
And, goodness, can it *all* be meant for me?

It can and is. And such are small affairs
Compared with Tompkins and his Lewis gun,
Or eager folk who play about with flares,
And, like as not, mistake me for a Hun;

Compared with when some gunner, having dined,
To show his guest the glories of his art
'Poops off a round or two,' which burst behind,
But fail to drown the beating of my heart.

Sweet to all soldiers is the rearward view;
To infanteers how grand the gunners' case!
And I suppose men pine at G.H.Q.
For the rich ease of people at the Base,

To me is sweet this mean and noisome ditch,
When on my belly I must issue out
Into the night, inscrutable as pitch—
I wish to God that I was not a Scout!"

THE DESERTERS

WHERE are the maids that used to lay my
table,
And cook my meals and (sometimes) scrub
the floor ?
Florrie and Maud and Emily and Mabel,
All, all are gone to prosecute the war :
In reeking vaults and mountain dells
They tend their sheep or fill their
shells,
While my wife answers all the bells,
And no one shines my Sam Browne any
more.

Where is Elizabeth, whose eyes were argent ?
Ah, what a home *her* hospital must be !
Winnie's a "Waac," and bound to be a
Sergeant
Judging from how she dominated me
(Only I hope she never stoops
To talk like that to Lady troops) ;
And Maud, who dropped so many soups,
What does she do with bombs and T.N.T. ?

Our car stands starving in the dusty garage,
But Mabel drives a whacking limousine;
And when they sprinkle us with bits of barrage,
We know that much of it was made by Jean.
Our income slowly disappears,
While they get more than Brigadiers—
No wonder now the agent sneers,
"You *can't* get girls to come to Turnham Green!"

Do they look back, and hope that we are happy,
With no one left to fuss about our food,
And when some foreman is extremely snappy,
Recall with tears my courtlier attitude?
Rather, I ween, with mirthful hoots
They think of Master cleaning boots,
And thank their stars, the little brutes,
They bear no more the yoke of housemaidhood.

And what will happen when the Boche goes under,
And all these women fling their swords away?
Will the dear maids come back to us, I wonder?
Shall I be able to afford their pay?

And will they want Munition rates?
Ah, who can read the ruthless Fates? —
Meanwhile, we wash the dirty plates,
And do our whack as willingly as they.

FREE MEALS

When William had not crossed the Rhine
 And food could still be found,
How often did we all decline,
If some one asked us out to dine,
 Upon the smallest ground!
Because his talk was imbecile,
 Because his face was plain,
One used to miss the loveliest meal
 And not get asked again.

Less oft to-day do men endow
 Their famished friends with food;
Free dinners are free dinners now,
And to refuse, as all allow,
 Is rather mad than rude;
While prudent folk, with frank delight,
 Both indigent and rich,
When asked to "Come and dine some night,"
 Make answer, "Thank you; *which?*"

My old friend Hubert, like some bee,
 From host to host doth flit
For dinner, lunch, and even tea
(I do believe he'd breakfast free
 If he could manage it);

Till, having drained all other flowers
And reached an anxious point,
He flies to Streatham and devours
His Aunt Jane's Sunday joint.

In olden days he only knew
Those in the social swim,
But now he takes a broader view
And feeds with all (though very few
Have ever fed with him);
Only, I think, he has a doubt,
Only the world looks grey,
When different people ask him out
To dinner on one day.

And surely thus shall strife conclude
When rations get so small
That peers with peasantry have chewed,
And men are glad to take their food
With anyone at all;
Though, at the worst, I don't expect
The War will thus be done;
A starving world would still object
To eating with the Hun.

THE VENGEANCE

I NEVER liked the man at Number Nine,
But now my breast is bursting with its wrongs,
For when we had a few old friends to dine,
And crowned our feasting with some gentle songs,
Instead of simply drinking in the glamour,
The charm of it, he had the cheek to hammer
The party-wall with pokers and with tongs!

Ah, me! that Art should suffer such disdain!
But what can one expect in time of war?
Mayhap our minstrelsy had given pain
To some tired patriot in bed next door—
Some weary soul that all day fashions fuses,
To whom his sleep is more than all the Muses—
And so, for England's sake, we sang no more.

No longer now the hideous truth is hid:
The man is nothing but a Pacifist!
And, what is worse, he draws four hundred quid
For representing views which don't exist—

Although in Parliament, without his poker,
I'm glad to see they would not hear the croaker,
But when he talked they only howled and hissed.

And now the neighbourhood with zeal prepares
To make a night of it when next we sing;
We shall not waste our soft romantic airs,
But the glad street with warlike strains shall ring
Of blood and armaments and Fritz's whacking,
And he shall hammer till the walls are cracking,
And the whole suburb joins us in "The King."

THE WAR-DREAM

I WISH I did not dream of France,
And spend my nights in mortal dread
On miry flats where whizz-bangs dance
And star-shells hover o'er my head,
And sometimes wake my anxious spouse
By making shrill excited rows
Because it seems a hundred " hows "
Are barraging the bed.

I never fight with tigers now
Or know the old nocturnal mares—
The house on fire, the frantic cow,
The cut-throat coming up the stairs
Would be a treat; I almost miss
That feeling of paralysis
With which one climbed a precipice,
Or ran away from bears.

Nor do I dream the pleasant days
That sometimes soothe the worst of wars,
Of omelettes and estaminets
And smiling maids at cottage doors;

But in a vague unbounded waste
For ever hide with futile haste
From 5·9's precisely placed,
And all the time it pours.

Yet, if I showed colossal phlegm,
Or kept enormous crowds at bay,
And sometimes won the D.C.M.,
It might inspire me for the fray;
But, looking back, I do not seem
To recollect a single dream
In which I did not simply scream
And try to run away.

And when I wake with flesh that creeps,
The only solace I can see
Is thinking, if the Prussian sleeps,
What hideous visions *his* must be!
Can all my dreams of gore and guns
Be half as rotten as the Hun's?
I like to think his blackest ones
Are when he dreams of me.

THE PASSING OF THE COD'S HEAD

(A Romance of Chiswick Mall.)

It was because the dustman did not come ;
 It was because our cat was overfed,
And, gorged with some superior pabulum,
 Declined to touch the cod's disgusting head ;
It was because the weather was too warm
 To hide the horror in the refuse-bin,
And too intense the perfume of its form,
 My wife commanded me to do the sin,
To take and cast it in the twinkling Thames—
A practice which the neighbourhood condemns.

So on the midnight, with a strong cigar
 And scented handkerchief, I tiptoed near,
But felt the exotic fragrance from afar ;
 I thought of Arthur and Sir Bedivere :
And it seemed best to leave it on the plate,
 So strode I back and told my curious spouse,
" I heard the high tide lap along the Eyot,
 And the wild water at the barges' bows."
She said, " O treacherous ! O heart of clay !
Go back and throw the smelly thing away."

Thereat I seized it, and with guilty shoon
 Stole out indignant to the water's marge;
Its eyes like emeralds caught the affronted
 moon;
 The stars conspired to make the thing look
 large;
Surely all Chiswick would perceive my shame!
 I clutched the indecency and whirled it round
And flung it from me like a torch in flame,
 And a great wailing swept across the sound,
As though the deep were calling back its kith.
I said, "It will go down to Hammersmith;

It will go down beyond the Chelsea flats,
 And hang with barges under Battersea,
Will press past Wapping with decaying cats,
 And the dead dog shall bear it company;
Small bathing boys shall feel its clammy prod,
 And think some jelly-fish has fled the surge;
And so 'twill win to where the tribe of cod
 In its own ooze intones a fitting dirge,
And after that some false and impious fish
Will likely have it for a breakfast dish."

The morning dawned. The tide had stripped
 the shore,
 And that foul shape I fancied so remote
Lay stark below, just opposite next door!
 Who would have said a cod's head could not
 float?

No more my neighbour in his garden sits ;
 My callers now regard the view with groans ;
For tides may roll and rot the fleshly bits,
 But what shall mortify those ageless bones ?
How shall I bear to hear my grandsons say,
"Look at the fish that Granddad threw away"?

PRINTED BY MORRISON AND GIBB LTD., EDINBURGH

PR 6015 E58B6 Herbert, (Sir) Alan Patrick
The Bomber gipsy, and other poems

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